focus

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ALICE TAYLOR, EDITOR

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Korea

To be a victim of aggressive foreigners has been all too often the unhappy fate of Korea. To the west and northwest lies China, to the northeast the Soviet Union, to the southeast Japan, each of which in turn has coveted this strategically located peninsula. Devastating invasions came from the Chinese in the second century B.C.; from the Chinese again in the seventh century A.D.; from the Tartars in the early eleventh; the Mongols in the thirteenth; the Japanese in the late sixteenth; and the Chinese Manchus in the seventeenth. After this the Koreans succeeded more or less in maintaining a policy of isolation until, in 1904-5, they were drawn into the Russo-Japanese War, which resulted in 40 years of domination and exploitation by Japan.

When Japan was defeated by the United States in World War II (1945), Korea at last had hopes of independence. But once again it was not to be given a chance to choose its destiny. Immediately after Japan's surrender, the Soviet army set up a military occupation controlling the territory north of the 38th parallel. American forces took over south of the parallel. Later the United Nations supervised elections in South Korea to form a government from which evolved the Republic of Korea. North of the parallel, the Russians organized the Democratic Republic of Korea, along the usual Communist lines.

In 1950 North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel, the United Nations labeled it aggression, and the United States and 15 other free nations came to the defense of the Republic of Korea. Three years later a truce line was established which runs diagonally across the country roughly at the level of the 38th parallel.

Remarkably, through all these vicissitudes the Koreans have preserved a language of their own, a culture expressed in literature, painting, architecture, and handicrafts, and distinctive religious and social customs. Their social customs, based largely on Confucian principles, the father-dominated family and rigid class stratification, have been until recently extraordinarily stable.

THE KOREAN PENINSULA* with its adjacent islands covers an area of 85,266 square miles, about that of Minnesota, and stretches between latitudes 43°N and 33°N, approximately those of New England and South Carolina.

To use the vivid figure of speech of an early French father — the first European to view the land — the whole peninsula appears to be "a sea

* This section is based largely on part of George H. T. Kimble's article on Korea, FOCUS, Vol. 1, No. 1, Oct., 1950.

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lashed by a heavy gale." But, in fact, there are some well-marked differences, notably between the eastern and western parts of the country. The eastern half has a great deal more rough land than the western; it has several high mountain ranges, many deeply entrenched valleys, few large areas of lowland, and practically no coastal plain. The western half has most of the large rivers, and a virtual monopoly of the richer alluvial lands.

Quite as notable are the climatic contrasts between the various parts of the peninsula. The extreme north has a long, cold winter, with five months below freezing; even the sea freezes hard inshore for about three months. In the south conditions are less severe, though the temperatures are low for the latitude: for example, at Pusan, at about the same latitude as Cape Hatteras, the average January temperature is the same as that on Long Island (N. Y.). In the summer temperatures are more nearly uniform, but whereas along the south coast the thermometer may rise above 80°F. any day from May to October, in the north such temperatures are rare except in June, July, and August. Similarly, the southerly (rain-bringing) monsoon lasts several weeks longer in the south than in the north. While it lasts, the average monthly rainfall is between 8 and 12 inches; the skies are seldom clear, and the roads are often deep in mud.

There are also marked contrasts between east and west. In the summer the east coast is usually sheltered from the prevailing southerly winds and is therefore relatively fog-free; the more exposed south and west coasts, on the other hand, may be hidden from view days at a time during the height of the monsoon.

These differences of terrain and climate are reflected in the land use and population patterns. Rice, barley, rye, cotton, tobacco, and mulberry cocoons are the dominant crops in the south and west, and, with the help of the long summers and heavy rain, two harvests a year can be obtained. In the north, the farmers have to be content with one crop; because of the shorter growing season and smaller rainfall, this is generally corn, wheat, millet, potatoes, oats, soybeans, or some other dry-field crop, though rice is grown in the better-favored places.

The population map reveals equally great regional differences. About 20 million people live south and west of a line from P'yongyang to Pusan; in density, this means a population of more than 600 to the square mile—phenomenal, even for the Orient. In the northeastern half the density is well below 125 to the square mile in large areas.

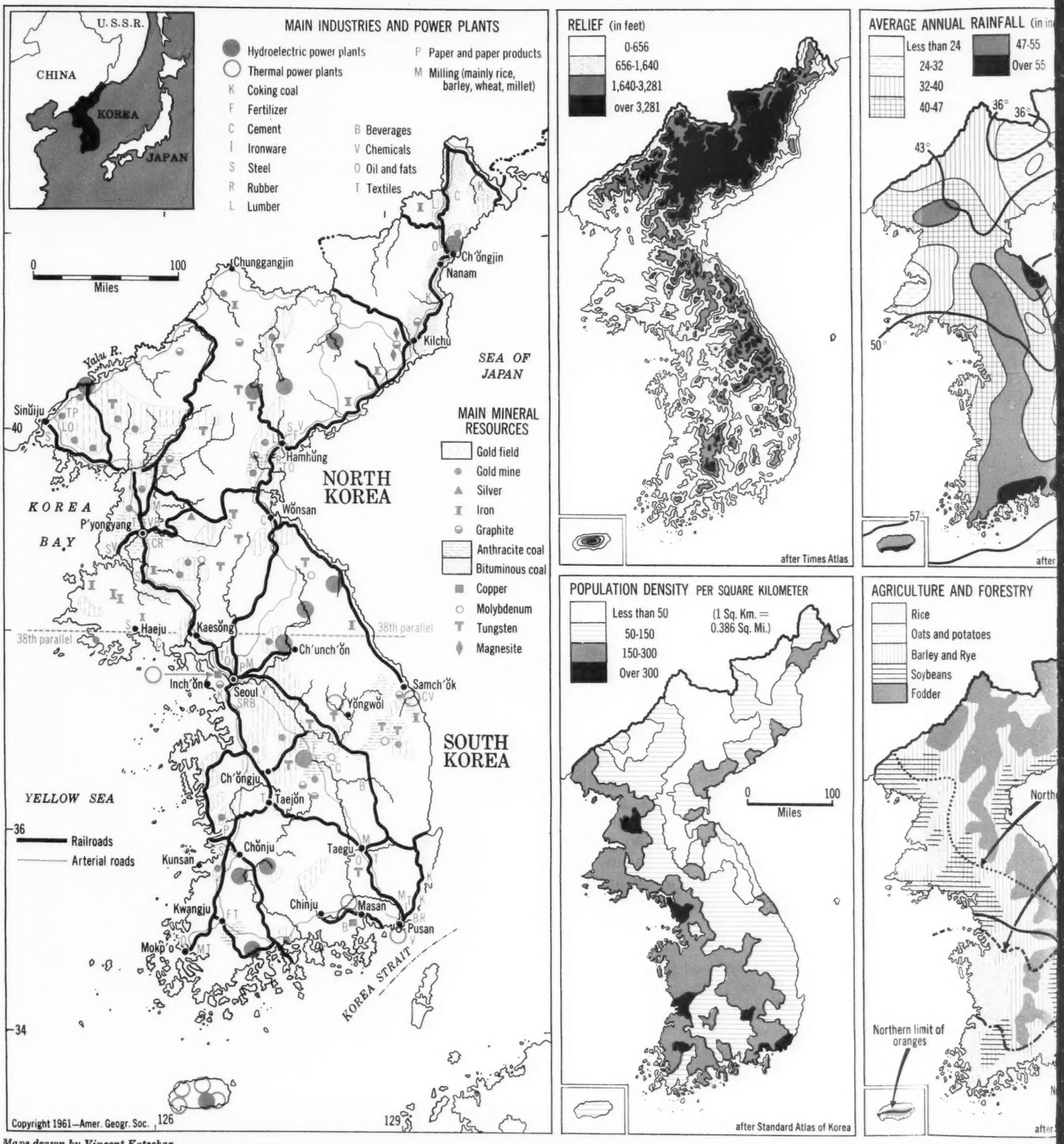
But it is in the scattering of industrial raw materials and power that we find the most striking regional differences. Within a radius of 50 miles around the city of P'yongyang are located some of the most useful deposits of coal and iron ore in the entire peninsula. Away to the northeast, is another highly mineralized area, containing what is thought to be a billion-ton reserve of iron ore. In the north also are sizable gold, graphite, and tungsten deposits, and huge quantities of hydroelectric power.

The industrial resources of the southern part of the peninsula are, by comparison, meager. The coal is mostly low grade anthracite and lignite and the hydroelectric sites are few and scattered; however, there are workable deposits of iron ore, tungsten, graphite, lead, and zinc.

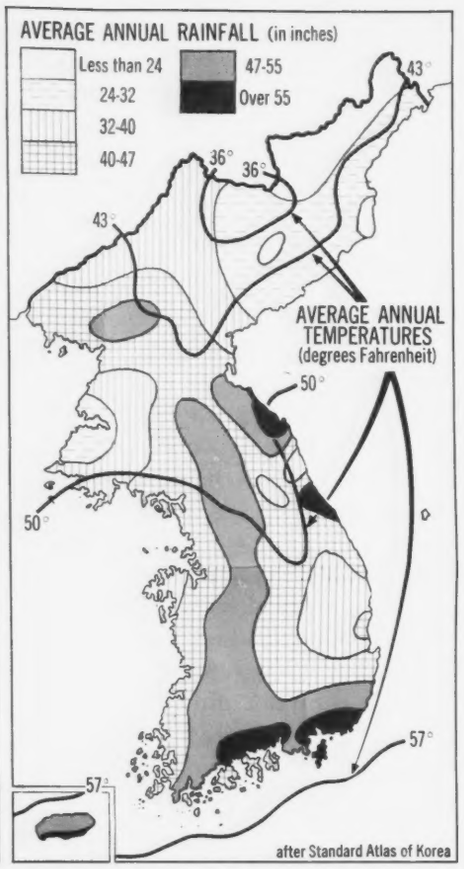
To dramatize the contrasts between north and south: before the war, in 1944, the north produced more than twice as much coal, 30 times as much iron ore, and almost 23 times as much hydroelectricity as the south. The north also led overwhelmingly in the production of limestone and magnesite. The relative standing of the two parts in industrial production at that time is indicated by the fact that the north handled 85 per cent of the country's mineral output, while the south produced nearly 90 per cent of the textiles and had most of the food processing plants.

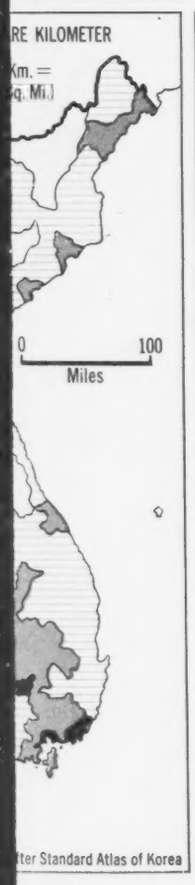
Such disparities between the economic productivity of the two halves of the country led to the development of a lively north-south exchange of goods. To a striking degree the products of north and south were complementary. The north needed rice and textiles from the south; the south needed wood, coal, iron, machinery, and power from the north. It is not surprising, therefore, that the physical and cultural diversities which formerly made for strength now pose problems for both the north and the south, and particularly the south.

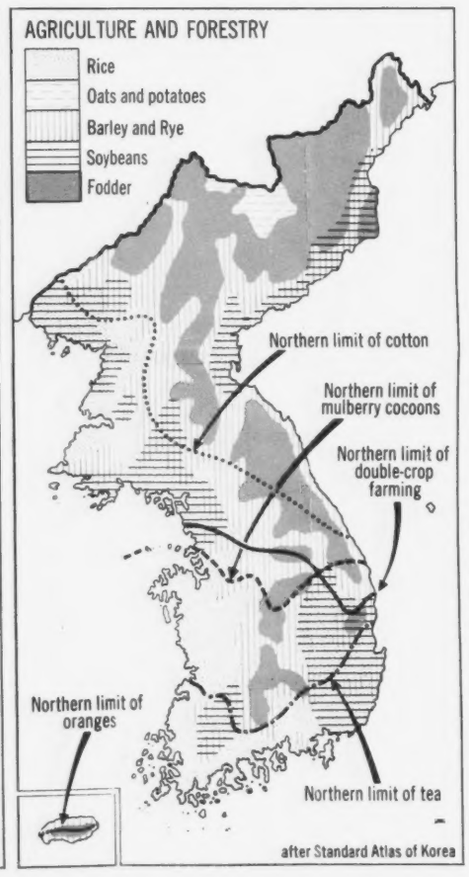
EVOLUTION IN NORTH KOREA. It is difficult to shed light on events in North Korea since "liberation" (1945), for no impartial observers have been able to examine the situation firsthand. One must rely mainly on documents published by the admin-



Maps drawn by Vincent Kotschar







istration, and the figures, as in other Communist regimes, are often expressed in terms of percentages or as goals, and are not always reliable.

Before the war, under Japanese rule, it is generally conceded that the position of the peasant throughout the Korean peninsula had been deteriorating. A process of dispossession had been taking place which was turning farmers into owner-tenants (who owned part and rented part of the land they cultivated) or outright tenants. Although the process was not as far advanced in the north as in the south, in 1938, 22 per cent of the rural people in the north were owner-tenants and 45 per cent were tenants. The average rent was between 50 and 60 per cent of the crop. The size of the average land-holding was small: more than half of the owners had less than 2.45 acres (1 *chungbo*), and 90 per cent had less than 12.25 acres.

Shortly after liberation, a land reform program was initiated. Some 2.5 million acres, or nearly half of the total sown area, were confiscated without compensation from large landowners and distributed free to peasants with no land or with little land. To ensure a food supply for its 10-million-odd citizens, the government imposed a farm tax ranging from 10 per cent of the crop for less productive land to 27 per cent for irrigated fields. Apparently, however, the actual proportion of the harvest taken has been generally 50 per cent.

State farm and machine-hire stations soon began to appear, and in 1954 collectivization began. Private ownership of the land was at first preserved, but new rules (1959) for the so-called "agricultural cooperatives" provide for joint ownership of the land and state that a member who leaves a cooperative can not receive a share of the jointly owned means of production (meaning, presumbaly, agricultural equipment, draft animals, etc., even though these originally belonged to him).

By the end of 1957, over 95 per cent of the peasant holdings were in cooperatives, and in 1958, as in China, the existing cooperatives were merged into larger units, which are slated to construct "socialist cultural, rural villages" equipped with schools, clinics, restaurants, and day nurseries.

Despite the destruction of land, dams, and draft animals in the 1950-53 war, which have had to be rehabilitated or replaced, apparently farm production has increased to above prewar levels. The output of rice in 1957 was 1.6 million tons, as compared with 1.2 million in 1949; that of other grains was 1.7 million tons, as compared with 1.5 million. Particular emphasis has been placed on the growing of vegetables, and production seems to have nearly doubled. The tobacco crop also increased.

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To raise productivity, farm mechanization has been pushed as rapidly as possible. In 1959 there were 5,300 tractors in operation; the goal is 30,000 within the next four or five years. Wherever feasible, the motive power to be used on farms will be electricity, rather than fuel oil. By 1959, a total of 700 small and medium electric power plants had been established, and 1,000 others were under construction. The total electric power production, incidentally, in 1956 was 5 billion kilowatt-hours (the 1949 figure was 6 billion), and planned output for 1961 was 9.5 billion.

Comparison of 1949 and 1957 figures (generally the most recent figures available for both Koreas are 1957 or 1958) indicates that lumber production doubled; and so did the fish catch even though all but 42 vessels had been destroyed in the war. Intensive efforts were made to repair and expand the railroads, which had been almost totally put out of commission, and rail freight tonnage by 1956 had risen to 18 million tons, 2 million more than in prewar times.

More than 90 per cent of all the industry in North Korea is nationalized, and the tax laws are aimed at curtailing the profits of private industrialists and merchants. They also favor scientists, intellectuals, and artists. As in other Communist countries, planning has emphasized the development of heavy industry. Enormous sums have been spent to restore and expand the coal industry, and production rose to 4 million tons in 1956, nearly the 1949 figure; planned output for 1961 was 6.8 million tons. Restoration and new construction raised the production of iron ore to 1 million tons in 1958, and that of steel exceeded the prewar level by 30 per cent.

Old factories have been repaired and new ones built to make all sorts of machinery, such as agricultural and mining equipment, pumps, diesel engines, and automobile parts, and great quantities of cement. Apparently the chemical industry also has expanded noticeably.

EVOLUTION IN SOUTH KOREA. Besides postwar devastation, the South has had to contend with a shortage of industrial resources, a rapidly increasing population, plus some 4 million immigrants (2 million refugees from North Korea, and 2 million repatriates from the former Japanese Empire). All of these have hindered efforts to rebuild and expand the agricultural and industrial sectors of the economy and raise the standard of living of the country's 22 million inhabitants.

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